

## Lakeland senior wins national scholarship

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It would have been easy for Brenton Stokes to throw in the towel, and most people probably wouldn't have blamed him.

Brenton weathered tumultuous times in high school, but he never let his circumstances get the better of him.

Now, his hard work has paid off. Brenton was one of 104 students in America, and one of two students in Virginia, chosen to receive the Horatio Alger National Scholarship, given by the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans.

"Receiving the award validates me as a person of convictions," he said. "I feel very privileged to be a part of this opportunity. I often go on the scholarship Web site and look at the list winners to see my name there."

The scholarship is worth \$20,000 and is distributed to students who have "faced and overcome great obstacles in their young life, while demonstrating strength of character, a commitment to pursue a college education and a desire to contribute to society," according to an announcement about the award. "The national scholars are among the best and most determined youth in America."

The association was established in 1947 to dispel the mounting belief among the nation's youth that the American Dream was no longer attainable, according to a history on its Web site.

Brenton would have had good reason to believe that the dream was out of his reach.

"In 8th grade, when I was getting ready to go into high school, I thought everything was just going to fall into place," he said. "But a lot of those things didn't fall into place."

Brenton's father left him and his mother, and they had to move into his aunt's home. Two years later, they had to move in with his grandparents.

"Before all that happened, I was at a point in my life where I was still finding my identity," he said. "You see certain people and things you want to be a part of. I wanted to be one of those people who had an idea of what they wanted to be and belong to. Not having anything gave me a lot of room to dream."

To pursue that dream, Brenton became involved with Lakeland's marching band, concert band, academic challenge team, student council, jazz ensemble and Senior Beta Club. But participating in all those extracurricular activities raised its own challenges. He didn't have a car, and he didn't have a laptop computer.

"I get home from school most nights at 8 p.m. and then start my homework," he said. "I've had to learn to cope with a lot of things that most people consider easy. It's been a challenge for me to get those simple tasks done, because of my limited resources."

No matter his troubles, though, he never let it come between him and his end goal.

"My mother always told me how much potential I had, and that I had to step into my own greatness," he said. "I had this idea that if everyone else can do it, why can't I do it even better?"

After attending Brown University last summer to take two undergraduate classes, his dreams of going to college began to solidify.

"When I went there, everything clicked," he said. "I came back to Virginia in August and had my mind set on this school. I was going to do whatever it took to get back there this fall."

This fall he plans to attend Brown, majoring in musical composition and mechanical engineering. His end goal is to become a car designer.

"There were a lot of things I wanted to do with my life, but I couldn't get things off the ground," he said. "When I look back, though, I'm grateful for not being able to get a lot of things I wanted. If I had gotten them, I probably wouldn't have appreciated them. My ideals have evolved so much over the years. Having been deprived, I'm at the point that I'm ready to have this and have this opportunity to do something with my life. I know what I want."